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ON THE WATERFRONT:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

Margaret Louise Cathey

A WARTIME JOURNEY: FROM OTTUMWA, IOWA
TO THE RICHMOND SHIPYARDS, 1942

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1985



MARGARET LOUISE CATHEY

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning, 1986

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INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.

After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence than a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990
San Francisco, California

PREFACE

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.

Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.

When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.

In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.

Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became their project, with a life of its own.

This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

February 23, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Margaret Louise Cathey

I met Louise Cathey, a soft-spoken native Iowan and former Kaiser shipyard worker, at her home in Richmond. Though I've seen her on several occasions since, this was a one-interview oral history, a compact session revealing the directness of a Midwesterner. During the interview there was a technical disaster when the rechargeable batteries, which had been checked out before the session, died midway in the story. We continued with a back-up set of batteries, but unfortunately a crucial part was lost.

The unrecorded segment was a poignant part of the story with Louise telling me of leaving her two young children with her mother on the family farm in Iowa in 1942 as she joined her husband in the Richmond shipyards. She took the train alone and after a three-day trip disembarked at the 16th and Macdonald Street train station expecting to be met by her husband. After a two-hour wait she realized that he was not coming and took a cab to the boarding house where he was living. The couple immediately had to find new lodging since women were not allowed to stay. They rented a room with a laundry but no cooking facilities. They ate out, which Louise said she didn't mind..."I never did like cooking."

On her second day in Richmond, Louise registered for work as a welder in the shipyards. She spent her first two weeks picking up scrap metal until she entered a training program. Arriving in August, she and her husband moved into a war housing apartment in October. By December the marriage had broken up. Frozen in her defense job and unable to return to Iowa, this was her first Christmas away from her family. Some fellow shipyard workers, who still remain friends today, invited her to join them for the holidays.

Single and no longer eligible for war housing, Louise bought a small trailer and moved to a trailer camp in Hayward with two co-workers. They commuted by car to the Kaiser yards.

Louise said that a lot of romances flourished and marriages broke up in the shipyards. She met her second husband, Ray Cathey, a leaderman in her crew, in the Kaiser shipyards. Country music enthusiasts, the Catheys recalled attending dances and seeing Bob Wills and Dude Martin perform locally during the wartime period.

They have been married over forty years. Louise showed me a wonderful group picture of their work crew. A copy has been reproduced for the volume. She also saved her safety glasses and a welder's measuring tool.

At the end of the war, Louise lost her shipyard job but within a few weeks had found work in the telephone company. In 1946 she and Ray were married in the living room of their home and soon were reunited with her two children, Alan Lynn and Stephen Michael.

In 1985, the Catheys joined me at Richmond's first annual Festival by the Bay where I had an oral history booth and photo display. Upon seeing a blow-up of their shipyard picture, the Catheys went home and returned with lawn chairs. They spent the afternoon beside the photograph, posing and telling people about their shipyard days.

Louise Cathey has made only one trip back to Iowa since 1942 and did not find too many people she knew. Louise told me that she likes the idea of a small town but she never wanted to live in the country, saying that there was "too much work for a small return."

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

January 31, 1990
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name MARGARET LOUISE CATHEY

Date of birth Sept. 7, 1919 Birthplace FT WORTH, TEX.

Father's full name ALVIN MARTZ

Occupation _____ Birthplace GERMANY

Mother's full name EDWINA LOUISE WESTLY

Occupation HOUSEWIFE Birthplace AUSTIN, TEX

Your spouse(s) ELLSWORTH ALEXANDER RAYMOND CATHEY
DIVORCED PRESENT

Your children ALAN LYNN ALEXANDER
STEPHEN MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Where did you grow up? IOWA

When did your family first come to California? AUGUST 1943

Reasons for coming TO WORK IN THE SHIPYARDS

Present community 46 YRS RICHMOND How long? 46 YRS

Education (and training programs) HIGH SCHOOL

Occupation(s) 1ST JOB WAITRESS. WELDER IN SHIPYARDS
UNTIL WAR ENDED. 30 YRS PACIFIC TELEPHONE.

Special interest or activities

Fishing AND camping.

Volunteer at senior citizens center.

Traveling.

Ideas for improving Richmond's image

Reduce crime. Try

to revitalize downtown. A lot of cleaning
up in the streets, vacant lots etc.

What do you see for the future of Richmond?

Hopefully more

businesses, therefore more jobs. Maybe
less crime.

Family Background and Childhood in Iowa

[Interview 1: April 4, 1985]##

Dunning: What is your full name?

Cathey: Margaret Louise Cathey.

Dunning: What was your maiden name?

Cathey: I was married before. My maiden name was Blondell, but my married name before was Alexander, so my two children are named Alexander.

Dunning: In what year were you born?

Cathey: In 1919.

Dunning: Where?

Cathey: Fort Worth, Texas.

Dunning: How about your parents? Do you know where they were born?

Cathey: My mother was born in Austin, Texas. My father was born somewhere in Germany. He died when I was three months old. I never knew him, and my mother didn't tell me.

Dunning: Did you know your grandparents at all on either side?

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended.

Cathey: No. They were all dead when I was born.

Dunning: Do you remember any stories that your parents told you? Well, it would be your mother, telling you what it was like when she was growing up in Texas?

Cathey: No.

Dunning: Did she talk about her childhood?

Cathey: She had a stepmother. I think her real mother passed away when she was very small. The only thing she told me was her stepmother was not very nice to her. She had a brother. She lost track of him, and to this day I don't know where he is. He would be my uncle. I don't know if he would be still alive or anything.

Dunning: Can you tell me about your hometown in Texas?

Cathey: We left Texas when I was a small baby. We moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where my mother remarried. We lived there for--oh, let's see. I was six years old when we left and we moved to New Jersey. Secaucus was the name of the town. We lived there for three years.

My mother left that husband and moved to Omaha, Nebraska. We lived in Omaha, just she and I, about two years. I believe I was about nine years old when we moved to a farm in Iowa. I grew up there, went to high school. That's where I married my first husband.

Dunning: What part of Iowa was that?

Cathey: The first part was in Griswald. We moved from there to Birmingham. We lived on a farm, and that's where I got married and had my two children. Not at that home, but in the little town of Birmingham.

Dunning: What was that town like?

Cathey: Very small, and only about five hundred people population. Everybody knew everybody. The one thing I remember the most is the outdoor movies. They would only have them in the summertime when the weather was nice. We would sit on benches in front of this big screen, and we would have outdoor movies. That was our main source of entertainment. No movie house or anything like that. That's where my children were born.

Dunning: Could you tell me a little bit about your schooling there?

Cathey: I finished high school in Birmingham, and that's as far as I went. I started high school in Griswald. My freshman year, I think, is all I went there. Then we moved, and I finished the rest of it in Birmingham.

I graduated from high school. I get a notice every year about a class reunion. There was only twenty of us that graduated from that particular class. Now they have regrouped several years. They don't do just one class, but they regroup several years. I've never gone.

I've only been back once to Iowa since I came to California. I did visit the places where my children were born, and where we lived on the farm, but didn't see anyone that I knew.

Dunning: What kind of a farm did you and your mother live on?

Cathey: We grew corn and wheat. Small, it was, oh, I can't say how many acres. We had a couple cows, a couple pigs, and some chickens. And of course, my mother had help to do the work.

Dunning: I was going to ask you that, because she was single when she went there.

Cathey: Yes. She couldn't do the work herself, so we had hired help that did the heavy work, although she worked awfully hard too.

Dunning: Did the hired help live right on the premises?

Cathey: Yes. She furnished board and room for them. And, of course, paid them. Then, after I married, she married again.

Dunning: Now this was her third marriage?

Cathey: Yes. And she gave up farming. I don't know what she and my stepfather did.

Dunning: Did they stay in Iowa?

Cathey: They stayed in Iowa, but they lived in a different portion of the state, because he had family and they lived close to them, although she came to see me after the babies came. She wanted to see her grandchildren.

Move to Richmond, California to Work in the Kaiser
Shipyards, 1942

My husband and I lived there until my oldest son was three. Then we moved to Ottumwa, Iowa, which is where he worked. We lived there maybe another year, and then he came to California to work in the shipyards and left me there with the two children.

Then he sent for me, and I left the two children with my mother until I could find a place here. I didn't know what to expect here. I've tried to think what year I came. It was August of '42, I believe, when I arrived in Richmond.

Dunning: Do you remember the circumstances of your husband coming to Richmond?

Cathey: Well, we heard about the shipyards opening and the jobs that were available. He didn't have a steady job. He was what you call a tree trimmer. That was a seasonal job in Iowa, because you only did that in the summer-time. In the wintertime we didn't have very much. That's what he was doing, so he decided to come to California to work in the shipyards. I don't know why he picked Richmond, unless we had some brochure or report.

Dunning: You don't remember any leaflet or recruiter coming to your town?

Cathey: No I don't, unless it was maybe word of mouth. Maybe somebody might have come from the town and wrote and told him about it. But that's why he came, and that's why he sent for me to work in the shipyards too.

Dunning: How long after he came did he send for you?

Cathey: It was maybe two months.

Dunning: Oh, a short time?

Cathey: A short time, a very short time.

Dunning: Do you recall any of his first reactions? Did he write you, or call you up?

Cathey: No. He wasn't very good about writing. All he did was send me a letter for me to come. That's when I came by train. I arrived at the depot at 16th and Macdonald expecting someone to meet me, and there was no one there. He was working, and he didn't realize I was coming in at that particular time. I took a taxi to where he was living. When he got off work, I was there.

Wartime_Housing_in_Richmond

Dunning: Where was he living at the time? In the war housing?

Cathey: No, it was a home that the family had made into rooms for single persons, all men. We immediately had to go and find a place for us to stay because I wasn't allowed to stay there with him.

At that time, the shipyards or the hiring office had a special place. They had rentals, or a place where you could find a place. We found a room for couples on Lincoln, which is right over here. Twenty-fourth or 26th and Lincoln. That was where I spent my first night.

Dunning: You couldn't even stay with him the first night?

Cathey: Well, he came with me. He moved out that day too. Then the very next day I went to the hiring hall and signed up for a welding job.

A_Welder's_Job_in_the_Shipyard

Dunning: How did you happen to sign up for a welding job?

Cathey: I don't know. I don't know why, because I certainly hadn't--

Dunning: You didn't have a choice?

Cathey: I don't believe I did. I believe that's probably what they needed the most. But my first three days in the shipyard were picking up the welding rods that the welders discarded. I walked around in prefab, the Permanente. They called it prefab.

Cathey: I went around and around the superstructures where the welders were working picking up these spent rods or pieces of rod that they used to weld with, and put them in a box, and then I would turn them in to the welding shack, where what they did with them I don't know. I never worked so hard in all my life. I thought I had to just buzz around and be real busy, where they really didn't care what I did. I was just spending three days until they had room for me in the school.

Dunning: In the training program?

Cathey: Training crew. They had to train me to weld. I didn't know a thing about it.

Dunning: Did you feel like you learned anything those first few days?

Cathey: Well, I got the feel of the whole building. It was such a huge place, something I had never been in. And all these people from all walks of life, all coming and going and working, and the noise. The whole atmosphere was overwhelming to me.

Dunning: Particularly coming from Iowa.

Cathey: From a small town of a little more than five hundred people, then, because I came from Ottumwa. But I was sort of like a country girl come to the city. It was quite an experience.

Dunning: The building where you worked, is that where the Butler Aviation Building is?

Cathey: Yes. It's right across from Shipyard Number Two, I believe. They had the double bottoms on that side, what they call double bottoms. Later I found out that's one place I wouldn't want to work, because you

Cathey: had to get down in small places to do your welding, and the smoke, and the darkness, and the tight places. I don't think I would have liked that.

Training Program for Welders

Dunning: Can you talk a little bit about the training program?

Cathey: Well, as much as I can remember. I believe it was two weeks. You had to buy your full leather overalls, and jacket, and your hood, although I believe they let you purchase them and then they deducted the amount from your first check that you received. They paid me all the time I was there, even the three days I spent picking up those rods, and going to school.

I can't remember too much about the school, except at the end of it you had to pass a welding test in order to become a certified welder. Your work had to be waterproof.

Dunning: Do you remember who else was in your class?

Cathey: No, I don't.

Dunning: I'm trying to get an idea of whether it was predominantly women, or a mixture of men and women.

Cathey: I believe it was a mixture. I really can't remember any of the people though. I remember more of the people after I went to work after welding school than I did in the class itself. I remember we were in little booths. Of course, they had walls because of the flash from the welding, to keep people who weren't protected from getting their eyes damaged. Flashes, they used to call them.

Dunning: How much do you think you learned in two weeks?

Cathey: Well, I learned not to stick that rod.

Dunning: You learned some basic precautions?

Cathey: Yes. Although I did pass the welding test, I wouldn't say I was really a good welder until I had more experience on the superstructures where I worked. When we graduated from school, or left school and went to work, they put us working with a shipfitter or a somebody who was fitting the pieces together, and we just tacked them, more or less, just to hold them. Then someone up the line who was more experienced at welding would weld. We did what we call tacking for quite a while before we were called welders.

Dunning: You would be working on a very specific kind of job?

Cathey: Yes. We built the superstructure. It's the bottom of the ship, where they had the little cabins and rooms. That's the part we worked in prefab, and that's the part they would take out and take over to another shipyard and put on the main structure of the ship.

Dunning: How long did you participate in the tacking?

Cathey: Oh golly. I can't remember. I'd say a good six weeks, maybe more.

Dunning: I was trying to get an idea of how you advanced, or if it was possible to advance.

Cathey: I think it depended a great lot on how many available people they had welding. I started out with one crew, and all that crew did was tacking. That was the part of the assembly line that you were on, that particular leaderman with his crew. That was his job. Then when

Cathey: I transferred from one crew to the next crew, I was put on welding. I really can't say how long I was on that one crew. It's been too long ago.

Dunning: Do you recall what you were welding when you actually went from tacking to welding?

Cathey: It was what they call floor welding. It was the side welding around where they put the wall down to the floor, and that part. That had to be water tight. You could weld one day, and the next day you could, on your break or something, you could walk up to where you welded, and they had already checked it. You could see your mistakes if it wasn't water tight, because they would have a big check mark there.

Dunning: Would you be reprimanded about that?

Cathey: No. I never was. They had special people come in that did that, that repaired those spots.

Daily_Routine

Dunning: Can you give me an idea of a typical day for you in the shipyard, what the schedule was like?

Cathey: I worked the day shift and I had to be there at seven o'clock. You checked a time clock, and you had a locker where you had your leathers, and you put those on.

Dunning: Your leathers? A leather apron, or--?

Cathey: You had overalls, and you had a jacket, and you had a hood, and leather gloves.

Dunning: All that was leather?

Cathey: It was all leather, just like those pictures. I think they required you to wear safety shoes, but I don't remember too much about that. Then you reported to your leaderman. He would send you off with whatever person if you were going to work with, like the ship-fitters when we were doing the tacking. He would send you to that particular place.

We had long hoses--that's where you got your power, through that hose, from a machine--it had to be taken from the machine clear up maybe two or three flights to the top of the superstructure, or wherever it had to go. You had to have the length of hose to get you there.

Dunning: Sounds like a fireman.

Cathey: Yes, only it was an electrical hose.

Dunning: It was narrower?

Cathey: It was small. But my husband Ray, when I came on his crew, he always made sure all his welders had the hose to where their job was if he had to carry it himself. He would set you up and get you ready to do your job for the day. He did that with all his welders. All the leadermen didn't do that. Sometimes you had to do it.

With three crews working, day, swing, and graveyard, the hoses were all over, and knotted, and in piles. It was hard sometimes to find enough hose for you, but you always did. Then you worked. I believe lunch was at eleven or eleven thirty.

Dunning: Did you have a break in there?

Cathey: You had a break in the middle. You didn't all go at once. Whenever you had to go, or whenever you wanted to go. I don't remember anybody abusing it. You

didn't have a break room. You had a rest room. I tried, but I couldn't inhale, and when I did try I almost choked to death, and I said, "This isn't worth it to me. I'm not going to learn to do that." So I didn't.

Dunning: I bet you're happy about that.

Cathey: I've always been grateful for that. It was a temptation because that's what everybody did. They would sit down and have a cigarette and eat a candy bar, or whatever.

Dunning: Were there any rules about smoking in the workplace? When you were actually working, could people smoke?

Cathey: I don't recall, because I didn't smoke, but I don't believe there were any rules against it. There might have been too, because I remember that's what most all of them did on their breaks. But I didn't.

Dunning: How long would lunch be?

Cathey: Thirty minutes.

Dunning: Would you usually bring your lunch, or was there a cafeteria?

Cathey: There wasn't a cafeteria. They sold box lunches. I usually picked up something on the way in. When I went in at seven o'clock I would pick up something for lunch, a sandwich or something. I believe they had machines with the cokes and coffee. I don't remember that part too much. In those days I didn't eat as much as I do now.

Dunning: Then after lunch you would return to your--?

Cathey: Return to your work, and another break in the afternoon, and then I would leave at four o'clock,

Cathey: which was when we got off. A whistle blew, and everybody stopped. Another shift started. You could see people coming in for the swing shift as you were leaving. It went continuously, the shipyards did.

Safety Rules of the Workplace

Dunning: Were there many rules and regulations in the workplace?

Cathey: I think there was a lot of safety rules.

Dunning: Any that really stand out in your mind?

Cathey: Later, when I moved from the superstructure to what they called the plate shop, which was all flat welding, they had overhead cranes that were going by, moving big sheets of steel. If you saw one of them going over where you were working, you were supposed to move out of the way, so in case they dropped it, you wouldn't get squashed.

Of course, in the welding lines, they tried to keep people from tripping over them, but they ran all over. You just had to watch where you walked. I'm sure there were more rules about the electricity and the motors and machines that were around.

But there was nobody actually standing over you, watching you. You used your own head more or less. I don't remember any extra other rules, other than being there on time.

Dunning: Do you recall any accidents on the job.

Cathey: Not where I worked, no. I'm sure there were many, but not where I was.

Dunning: Was there an industrial nurse?

Cathey: Oh yes. They had a first aid station, and there was a nurse there.

Dunning: Right within the prefab building?

Cathey: Yes, right. I never did have to go, thank goodness. I don't remember anybody else that did either. But yes, we had a nurse there.

Camaraderie in the Shipyard

Dunning: What was the atmosphere in the shipyards at that time? They had people coming from many different parts of the country, and--

Cathey: Old, young and--in our group there was a great camaraderie. We enjoyed each other, and everybody seemed to get along. There was a little jealousy or preference as to what job you took or had, but your leaderman had to take care of that. He was to tell you where to go, and you weren't supposed to complain and say, "Oh, I don't want to do that."

You were there to do the job regardless of whether you liked what you were doing. I don't remember too much of that. I think there probably were some favorites of some of the leadermen, but I don't remember.

Dunning: Were most of the leadermen male?

Cathey: Yes, that I recall. Yes.

Dunning: Do you recall any women leadermen?

Cathey: No, I don't. There might have been some, but I don't believe--there were women doing office work, but I don't remember any women leaders, no. There may have been some, but not where I worked. It was all men.

Dunning: Can you talk at all about what it was like to be a woman working in the shipyards in what was always known as a man's profession?

Cathey: Well, there was an awful lot of women, and I think they did just as well if not better in a lot of the jobs that they did. They were, I believe--maybe because I'm a woman--I think they were more conscientious about it. Of course, a lot of the men were older, and they weren't able to go in the army or navy. They were working in the shipyards. That was their part of the war effort.

Dunning: What kind of a reaction was there from some of the men? Did you hear a lot of jokes?

Cathey: Well, I wasn't exposed to that. I guess I was lucky, because the men that I worked for and worked with were very congenial and didn't treat me any different, or lord over me, or have that kind of attitude. No, they were all very nice and very helpful. I was lucky maybe. I don't know about the other ladies in the shipyard, but the ones I worked with seemed to be very content with what they did and how they were treated.

Dunning: Do you recall your salary starting off?

Cathey: No, I don't. It was more than I'd ever made in my life, but compared to today's rates it would be nothing, I'm sure. Even when I went to work for the telephone company, which was after the shipyard days, it was very little salary then, as it is now.

I worked for the phone company for thirty years after the shipyards, which closed as soon as the war ended, of course.

First Impressions of Richmond

Dunning: Can we backtrack a little bit? I wanted to ask you some of your first reactions arriving in Richmond, what it looked like to you.

Cathey: Like I said, I arrived at the 16th Street train depot. Southern Pacific I believe it was.

Dunning: You had been on the train for how long?

Cathey: Three days, I think. Two or three days. I was expecting my husband to meet me, and he hadn't gotten my letter, or he claimed he didn't. I waited at that depot for several hours, and finally decided there was no one coming. That's when I got up and went to his home, or where he was living. It was somewhere on Fifth or Sixth Street in Richmond.

I didn't know what to expect. The town looked all right. Of course, it's grown an awful lot since. It went up, and then it's gone way down now. I don't know if it will ever come back. I liked Richmond because it was all new to me.

Dunning: Richmond was pretty small before the war.

Cathey: Yes. Lots of vacant lots. All this area out here. Even though we moved to 24th and Lincoln, or we lived there first, there was an awful lot of vacant lots.

Dunning: Still, after you arrived?

Cathey: Yes. We had no car, so we walked or rode the bus everywhere we went. I've walked to work many times from this area to prefab.

Dunning: That was a good two, three miles?

Cathey: I would think so, yes. But I didn't think anything of it, because I had never had a car. In fact, I couldn't drive one at that time.

Dunning: And you were probably accustomed to walking?

Cathey: I was accustomed to walking or riding buses. I didn't mind riding the bus, but I didn't ride the buses that much. I walked a lot. We ate out. The first room we had was just a room. We had laundry privileges, but no cooking privileges, so we ate out all of our meals.

##

Dunning: You were saying you didn't have cooking privileges, so you ate out.

Cathey: I remember those little restaurants. In fact, most of the restaurants that were here then are no longer around.

Dunning: Any names, or--?

Cathey: There was a creamery, a Golden Creamery. We ate there quite often. Of course, Macy's wasn't here then. It's hard to remember way back.

Dunning: I would think it would be rather difficult, having come from a family where you had everything home grown, and then having to go out and eat in a restaurant.

Cathey: Well, I never was one that liked to cook anyway, so I kind of enjoyed it.

Dunning: I guess it would be a change, particularly coming home from work you were probably too tired to cook.

Cathey: Yes, and I didn't mind it at all. I arrived here in August, and we right away applied for one of those housing.

Dunning: The war housing?

Cathey: The war housing. We did get one in October. From August to October we lived in this one room. Then when we got the apartment, it was furnished. I didn't remember that they were furnished, but I know we didn't have any furniture, so it had to be furnished, because we had beds and we had a refrigerator, and we had a couch, and a table and chairs.

My mother sent bedding, towels, and cooking utensils that I had left from my home there in Iowa to set up housekeeping in this apartment. It was in that apartment that my husband and I got separated.

[Due to technical difficulties, the tape is unintelligible after this point]

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Dunning: Testing, one, two, three.

Cathey: Testing, one, two, three.

##

Breakup of First Marriage

Dunning: Okay. I think the point at which the recorder went a little crazy, you were telling me that you had arrived in August, and you moved into the new housing in October, and your marriage broke up about that time.

Cathey: It was shortly after that, I believe, maybe a month. Like I said, my first Christmas was spent with some friends I had made. They felt sorry for me and took me in for Christmas day. I was away from all my family, so they were very good to me, and they became very dear friends all through my life. We still hear from the lady. Her husband passed away, but she still corresponds with us.

Dunning: Were you at all tempted at that time to go back to Iowa?

Cathey: Yes. In fact, I would have had I not been frozen to my job. They didn't like for people to leave, or they said we couldn't leave. I guess if I had packed up and left, they couldn't have done anything about it, but I needed the money too.

No, I didn't go back. In fact, like I said, I've not been back but one time. My children came out here, and my mother has since passed away, so I have no one there now left, except maybe my ex-husband--some of his family may still be there. I don't know. I've not corresponded with any of them for many years.

Dunning: When did your children come to California?

Cathey: It was after I remarried. My mother took care of them until then, and then they came and lived with my new husband and myself. They both went to school here in Richmond and both graduated from Richmond High. One still lives here, although he lives near Pinole. The other one lives in Missouri. He moved to Missouri. They're both married and have children. I have eight grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Dunning: Your family has grown.

Cathey: Yes.

Romance_in_the_Shipyard

Dunning: I don't think it got on tape before that when you first met Ray, he was your leaderman.

Cathey: After I was on the first crew in the prefab and did the work with the shipfitters and did the tacking, then I got better and they moved me to a welding crew. That's where I met Ray, my husband now. He was my leaderman. We worked together all the rest of our time in the shipyards. I managed, if they moved him to another crew, I transferred along with him.

Dunning: Was it common knowledge that you two were dating?

Cathey: I think so, yes.

Dunning: Did that bother anybody?

Cathey: No, that was going on, I think, more or less.

Dunning: I was going to ask you, did romances flourish in the shipyards?

Cathey: Yes. And some marriages broke up too. We met many people from all walks of life, and although I didn't date anyone else, Ray was the only one I dated in the shipyards.

He was responsible for my going to work for the telephone company when the shipyards closed down. He had a friend in San Diego who worked for the telephone company, and he thought it was a good company for me to work for. I worked for the telephone company a year after the shipyards closed, and then we were married a year later.

Dunning: So that was a happier ending than a lot of people who couldn't find jobs afterwards.

Cathey: Yes. The telephone company, surprisingly enough, was begging for people. They were training. Every week they had three or four training classes. At that time we had a manual switchboard. Of course, in 1948 they went dial, and a lot of people had to transfer then, and they lost a lot of people. But when I hired in, they were wanting people, mostly women of course.

I think a lot of the people in the shipyards left Richmond when the shipyards closed. They went back home to wherever they were to start with, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas.

Dunning: I've heard some people say that there was a lot of talk about going home, and some people did go home, but then they returned with their families.

Cathey: That's true too. Now my husband Ray, he came up here with a man from San Diego. That man left his family in San Diego. He worked here by himself and lived in rooms, just like Ray did. He was by himself until he was able to buy a home and have his family come live with him. He had several children. Ironical as it seems, that man lives right up here on Esmond Avenue, a couple blocks up from where we live. He's since lost his wife, but his family all comes to see him. He lives alone.

But many people, a lot of men, came by themselves, and they later sent for their families. And I guess a lot of them settled here, because Richmond did grow quite a bit.

Dunning: Absolutely. It went from twenty-three thousand to well over a hundred thousand in a year's period.

Cathey: I was just reading last week in the Chronicle where they expect Richmond to grow to ninety-nine thousand again by the year 2000. I wonder.

Dunning: We'll have to wait and see I guess. One of the stories that didn't get on the tape was when you went down to meet Ray's family in San Diego.

Cathey: Oh. And our trip.

Dunning: How he had saved his gas stamps.

Cathey: He saved all his gas stamps in order to have gasoline to go. We had tire trouble. One time we had to buy three tires. Recaps, I think they called them. But we made the trip all right.

I met his mother and his sisters. He had three brothers in the service, one in the navy, one in the air force, and one in the marines. The girls, one was younger than he. She was still in school. The other three were working. His mother rented rooms. She had a large home, and they rented rooms to service people, and workers from the aviation plants. That's how she made her living. But that was home for Ray.

I remember one time, it was another Christmas that he took me. They had this beautiful big Christmas tree. I never saw such a beautiful Christmas tree, floor to ceiling. All the family was there. All the brothers and sisters happened to be there. That's the first experience I had with a large family, because I didn't have any family.

Dunning: And you were an only child?

Cathey: I was an only child, yes. They accepted me so nice and made me feel so welcome that I've always loved all of them, and I still do.

Dunning: I was going to ask you that, because here you were so young, and you were recently divorced. Certainly divorce wasn't as common as it is today.

Cathey: No, no.

Dunning: I was wondering if you were faced with much prejudice because of that.

Cathey: No, they were very nice. In fact, one of his sisters had recently divorced, and she was home at that Christmas gathering. She had lived in Detroit. They were all very nice to me, and treated me just very special. And they still do, like I said.

Dunning: That was a really fortunate event that you met Ray.

Cathey: I've always said that's the best thing that happened to me in my whole life. We've had thirty-eight years now.

Dunning: Can't knock that.

Cathey: No.

Dunning: That's wonderful.

Cathey: Yes. And his family is still very special to me, and they treat me very nice.

Single Women in the Shipyards

Dunning: I wanted to ask you, you do hear so much about the men coming to Richmond by themselves from the Midwest and the South, but you really don't hear that much about women. You came alone, but your husband was here. Do you remember any other women that would just see the recruitment flyers and decide to come on their own?

Cathey: I don't know how they got here, but I did meet several single women in my age group. In fact, after I separated from my husband, I gave up the housing

Cathey: apartment and moved. I bought a little trailer house in Hayward because I had made friends with these two girls, and they lived in another trailer house. So we were side by side.

Dunning: All the way in Hayward?

Cathey: In Hayward. We rode back and forth to work every day in a car pool. Because I was alone, I wanted to be close to people I had met. I guess that's why I bought the little trailer. I remember it wasn't very much money. We sort of had fun together. We went out together, the three girls.

We didn't particularly date anybody special, but those two girls ended up marrying. One married an A.C. Transit bus driver and she moved back to Arkansas. The other one, I think she married. I don't remember what he did. She got married though. She went somewhere, but I don't remember where she went. I wasn't as close to her as I was the other one.

As I was looking for these pictures the other day, I ran across the address of this one. Her name was Maudine, a strange name--the one that married the A.C. Transit bus driver and went back to Arkansas. I ran across her address and I wondered if she was still there. We don't communicate anymore, of course. It's been a long time.

Dunning: I'm trying to get an idea of whether people from the Midwest or the South kind of stayed together, or did you get to really know the people that were from the Bay Area?

Cathey: I don't remember meeting many people from--like Californians. No. Most all of my friends still are all from out of state. I have one sister-in-law that was born here. I think she was born in Fresno.



Louise, age 6 years,
Secaucus, New Jersey,
1925



Louise and friend Dale,
Birmingham, Iowa, ca. 1934



Above left: Louise's graduation picture, Birmingham High School, 1937.

Above: Louise, left, and friend Beatrice, 1936.

Left: Louise soon after her first marriage, 1938.





Welding crew at Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond, 1944. From right, leaderman Ray Cathey and his bride-to-be Louise Cathey.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

NO, THESE WELDERS are not taking six lessons from Madame La Zonga. No, they are not petting an invisible horse. No, they are not trying out for a job with the Radio City Rockettes. Well, then, there must be something wrong with this picture. One thing wrong is that it isn't 6:30 a.m. Remember that. The second thing wrong is that these welders aren't crashing through the Prefab gate. Because Ray Cathey's crew has a fine record for showing up every day

on time. They're in their seventh straight week without absences, they're 100 per cent on the bonds and the war chest, and they have one of the highest production welding records in the yard. They average 140 to 200 feet per man per day. They're whizzes. From l. to r. the whizzes read, Judy Heskett, Fay Warner, Julia Beck, Pauline Woods, Bob Bobbitt, W. G. Bowling, June Beatty, Rose Gonzales, Louise Alexander and Leaderman Ray Cathey.



Louise Cathey's union book used during her days as a welder in the Kaiser Shipyard.

International Brotherhood of Boiler Makers,
Iron Ship Builders and Helpers of America

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

Margaret Louise Alexander

Classification of Bearer

Welder

Where Born

Texas

Age at Date of Initiation 24 Years

Registered No. 1017034

Initiated 9-14-1943

Local No. 513

of Richmond City

State CALIFORNIA

Date Last Reinstated

1-17-44

SOCIAL SECURITY NO.

481-22-0383

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ORIGINAL—To be given to member.

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Registered No. 1017034 N° 281607 K

Received from Bro. Margaret Louise Alexander

Monthly Dues \$2.25

Insurance Premium \$1.25

Total \$3.50

Received Payment, A. F. of L.

Issued by Local No. 513 E. Patton

Financial Secretary

JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUNE JULY AUG. SEPT. OCT. NOV. DEC.

DIST. STAMP	Helper's Due and Insurance Receipt		
	RICHMOND, CAL		
	City	Date	SERIAL
		19	
	Registered No. 1017034	Nº 304970 H	
	Received from Bro. MARGARET LOUISE ALEXANDER		
	C. C. from Lodge No.	Monthly Dues 1.75	Insurance Premium 1.25
		Total - - - - 3.00	
	Issued by Local No. 513	Received Payment, E. WALTER, Financial Secretary	
	JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUNE JULY AUG. SEPT. OCT. N. DEC.		

Receipts from Louise Cathey's union dues.

DIST. STAMP	Helper's Due and Insurance Receipt		
	Richmond, Calif.		
	City	Date	SERIAL
		3-9-19	44
	Registered No. 1017034	Nº 117405 J	
	Received from Bro. Margaret L. Alexander		
	C. C. from Lodge No.	Monthly Dues - \$1.75	Insurance Premium \$1.25
		Total - - - - \$3.00	
	Issued by Local No. 513	Received Payment, H. E. Patton, Financial Secretary	
	JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUNE JULY AUG. SEPT. OCT. NOV. DEC.		

DIST. STAMP	Mechanic's Due and Insurance Receipt		
	AFFILIATED WITH A. F. OF L.		
	Richmond, Calif.		
	City	Date	SERIAL
		5-1	1945
	Registered No. 1017034	Nº 114789 K	
	Received from Bro. Margaret L. Alexander		
	C. C. from Lodge No.	Monthly Dues - \$2.25	Insurance Premium 1.25
		Total - - - - \$3.50	
	Issued by Local No. 513	Received Payment, H. E. Patton, Financial Secretary	
	JAN. FEB. MAR. APR. MAY JUNE JULY AUG. SEPT. OCT. NOV. DEC.		



Newlyweds Louise and Ray Cathey, Richmond, 1946.

Response_of_Richmond_Residents_to_Newcomers

Dunning: What kind of a reaction did the newcomers get from longtime Richmond residents?

Cathey: Well, I didn't have any experience that way, but I've heard that they resented all these people coming into their little town, although, like I said, I didn't have any experience that way. The people I met with were like I was. They were from out of state.

We came here to work, and it was quite a change, especially for me. I didn't read the papers like I do now, to know what the news media was talking about, the Richmond paper. We don't even have a Richmond paper anymore. So I wasn't exposed to that.

Dunning: Also, I wanted to ask you, were things segregated at that time in the shipyards? I know in the war housing there were rows of apartments that were for whites and rows that were for blacks.

Cathey: I didn't have much experience with that either. In fact, where I worked, I don't remember very many other races being there. I know we had some. I would see them, but I didn't work with them.

Dunning: Yes. In the picture you showed me, everyone is Caucasian.

Cathey: There's one lady there, she's Spanish, or Mexican. Her name is Rose Gonzales. You know the Gonzales restaurant? Well, she's a sister to Frank, who owns the restaurant. She was on our crew. Other than that, we didn't have--I don't know whether welding was one of the jobs that they particularly liked to do, because I don't remember any black welders.

Dunning: I'm just wondering if maybe there was some intentional directing of the jobs so that groups wouldn't be mixed.

Cathey: Not that I knew about. There may have been, but maybe I didn't know about it. I do remember seeing, it seemed like the shipfitters, or--no, I just don't remember very many black people in where I worked. There may have been in the other yards. We had how many? Four shipyards, besides prefabs? I'm sure there were many of them working here. But I wasn't around them.

Entertainment During Work Breaks

Dunning: Was there any social life connected with the shipyards?

Cathey: Very little, other than meeting the people you met, and you maybe met them afterwards. But no, we didn't have any social gatherings in the shipyards at all that I remember.

Dunning: Most people would just do their shift and leave?

Cathey: I remember one time Ann Shirley, the movie actress. I don't know if you know.

Dunning: No, I'm not familiar.

Cathey: Well, she wasn't a famous one I guess. Anyway, I have her autograph. She came to the shipyards. They were doing a film. I don't remember the name of the film or anything. I remember us all gathering around and listening to somebody's talk. I do remember getting her autograph on--I tore the corner off of my box lunch, and she signed Ann Shirley. I ran across that the other day.

- Cathey: Other than that, I don't remember any gathering except if they made some kind of an announcement about what was going to happen, if we were going to have any changes in our schedule or anything. That would be just our leaderman telling us.
- Dunning: Do you ever remember hearing the Singing Shipbuilders, which was a gospel quartet?
- Cathey: No.
- Dunning: A couple of the men are still alive. They would sing during some of the breaks and at lunch time at the shipyards.
- Cathey: No, we didn't have anything like that.
- Dunning: It was a big place.
- Cathey: Oh, yes. I think they had more activity in Shipyard One and Two. I think those were the biggest ones. I remember one time they loaned me. I went to, I believe it was Two, to do some welding. They had a special job they had to have done. I don't remember that much about it. I wish I did. It's so long ago.
- Dunning: What about social life outside the shipyards? I've heard that there were lots of bars that opened because of the shipyards.
- Cathey: I'm sure they did.
- Dunning: On San Pablo Avenue?
- Cathey: Oh, yes. They have a lot of them, little places. Mostly in, I would say, El Cerrito. There was a lot of them. Six Bells is one of them I remember.

Lines_for_Cigarettes

Cathey: The main thing I remember outside of prefab was the trucks that would come in selling cigarettes, all kinds of cigarettes. I stood in more cigarette lines for people who smoked to buy cigarettes so they would get the cigarettes. They would be any kind, ones you never heard of. They were so happy to get them. I remember doing that.

Dunning: Was there a quota on the amount you could buy?

Cathey: They were just hard to get, I think. They were hard to find. People who smoked were desperate, I guess, so they would smoke anything, any kind of cigarette. It wasn't like they have now, the other types of things to smoke. And the box lunches or the lunch wagons. That's all I remember being close to the shipyards.

I do know a lot of bars. I remember there were several bars in El Cerrito. I didn't patronize them too much, because I was still a country girl. Drinking was a no-no.

Country_Western_Music

Dunning: What about dancing? I have heard that there were a couple of dance halls in Richmond.

Cathey: Well, when I started dating Ray, we were always country-western fans. We still are. We still like the music. Dude Martin had a dance in some park on the south side. And Maple Hall up here in San Pablo had Ray Wade, I believe, was one of the bands.

Cathey: Then Bob Wills and his orchestra used to come quite often to Richmond. One time we went to Alvarado Park to see him. That may have been after shipyard days. We did enjoy that music. I used to go to dances there in those places.

Dunning: Do you think they happened because of the new population?

Cathey: I think so, yes.

Dunning: People brought their music with them, or--?

Cathey: Because as soon as the shipyards closed, they disappeared, so I think it was part of the entertainment for people who--especially all these Texans, and Oklahomans, and Arkansas people who liked that kind of music. Maybe the people who lived here in Richmond didn't care for it, I don't know, who were natives.

Dunning: They probably never heard it before that time.

Cathey: We used to enjoy that. Dude Martin was big. In fact, it seemed like he played almost every night. I went there quite often with Ray and some of our other friends.

Dunning: Ray, even being from San Diego, he still liked country and western?

Cathey: Well, he was born in Texas. His original birthplace was Texas, but he lived in San Diego. He came to San Diego when he was in his teens, and he lived there until he came to Richmond whenever the shipyard started. He has lived here ever since.

He's a little older than I am. When he lived in San Diego he had his own little body shop, he called it. He repaired automobiles. When the shipyards

Cathey: closed, he immediately went to work for Miller Motor Company, which was down on 11th Street in Richmond, the Oldsmobile agency, as a repairman for the wrecked autos.

He worked for them for--Let's see. Before we were married he worked there, and then after we married, he worked for a while. Then he got his own shop on 13th Street. He rented a building and opened up his own business. It's still in operation, only my son, not Ray's son, but my son, is running it.

Dunning: What is the name of it?

Cathey: Cathey Body Shop.

Dunning: I'll have to remember that.

Cathey: It's at Thirteenth and Rheem. Ray ran that until he retired.

Area Churches

Dunning: I wanted to ask you a little bit about the churches. Were you raised in a particular religion?

Cathey: No. All my life, from the time I can remember, wherever we lived--we moved around a lot--my mother sent me to a church in the neighborhood. I was never baptized until later. I went to several different churches: Christian Science, Lutheran, Methodist, anything that happened to be where we lived, that was close to me.

I never really joined or belonged to a church until--let's see, how long ago has it been? I'd say maybe fifteen years ago I joined the First Presbyterian

Cathey: Church here in Richmond, and I was baptized. I'm not a very good person to go every week, but I still keep in contact.

My church has grown so much that they now have what they call clusters. Each area is divided up into so many families, and you have a meeting once a month. I go to that every month, even though I don't attend church regularly. I keep in touch a little bit. I enjoy that very much.

Ray doesn't belong to my church. He was baptized as a Baptist in Texas, when they took you out to the pond and dunked you. Although I don't think he would go to the Baptist church now. If he went, he probably would go with me to my church, and maybe join. I don't know.

Dunning: I know with the new population coming, that's when the Baptist and Pentecostal churches really came to this area. Did you see much evidence of that?

Cathey: Not when I worked in the shipyards, but later when I worked at the telephone company, the different people would invite me to their churches.

Dunning: Did you go?

Cathey: I went once with one of the girls. I don't remember. I think it was called a Christian Baptist Church. I had never been to a church where they went forward to the front and confessed, or joined, or something, and the people in the back were saying, "Hallelujah." A sort of Pentecostal type thing.

That kind of bothered me. I didn't feel that way. So I didn't go back, I didn't go back to that church. I guess that her reasoning in taking me was maybe to get me to join, but I didn't exactly care for that.

Cathey: When I started going to the First Presbyterian, they didn't pressure you or anything. You just made up your own mind, and you attended classes and decided if you wanted to join. Then, if you did, you were baptized in front of the congregation. But no one shouted, or begged, or forced you. They didn't force you exactly, but anyway, I liked it better at First Presbyterian.

Dunning: I brought that up because it did seem to be a major influence of the shipyards in terms of the new kinds of churches in the area.

Cathey: That's strictly Southern and Midwest practices. I remember even in our little town of Birmingham the Pentecostal people would come and set up a tent on the edge of town in the summertime, and they would have a revival and try to get people to come. Many people did, I guess. I didn't go. But I do remember that. I think that's typical of the Midwest and Southern states. That's how they get people to come. There's nothing wrong with it, I don't think. It's just whatever you want, whatever you believe in.

Dunning: Whatever works for you?

Cathey: Whatever works for you. It didn't work for me. I like the way the Presbyterians did.

Recollections of the Shipyard Days

Dunning: I'm getting back a little bit to the shipyards. Are there any particular stories or people that you think should be remembered or documented? Any things that really stand out in your mind?

Cathey: I don't think so. Not that I was exposed to. Of course, there was a lot of people that we met, but they didn't do anything real outstanding or promote anything. They were just people, and good people. A lot of them stayed, and we kept in touch for many years, and a lot of them are gone now. We don't hear from them.

Dunning: Did you stay right until the war ended?

Cathey: Yes, I did.

Dunning: Did you know in your mind that your job was going to be over when the war was over?

Cathey: I guess we all did, really, because the contracts were cancelled the minute the war ended.

Dunning: How soon were you without a job?

Cathey: I applied for my unemployment, I think, the first week I was off work. At that time, it was two weeks before you could collect any unemployment. I guess the second week I applied for work at the telephone company, and I went to work before I ever got that first check. So it was just short time, maybe two or three weeks at the most, that I was unemployed.

Dunning: How much warning did you get for leaving the job at the shipyard? When did they tell you your job was going to be over, and when were you out?

Cathey: I don't think we had any warning at all. If I remember correctly, the news came over that the contracts were cancelled, and that was it. You just left. There was a short period in there when we were doing another type. I worked on Liberty ships, and we were doing another contract. It was a very short time if I remember correctly. It was welding. I was still welding, but it was all flat work. I think maybe they

Cathey: knew the war was going to be ending or something, because there was no notice. You didn't get two weeks notice or anything like that, no. You were just finished.

Dunning: You weren't around to tie up the loose ends, or--?

Cathey: No. They just let everyone go. Maybe there were some people there, the bosses or the office people, to do the paperwork, but I don't recall any of that.

Dunning: Do you recall the building of the Robert E. Peary?

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Cathey: Where we worked, we weren't in the area where they pushed the ship down off the ways into the water, launched them more or less. We would see pictures maybe on the walls of the office where they would show the person hitting the bottle on the bow or keel, but I wasn't in that area, so I didn't get in on any of that. I would kind of liked to, too.

Dunning: Did you see any of those dedications?

Cathey: I didn't get to see any of them.

Dunning: Did you have any kind of identification with the finished product, having worked on just a small area?

Cathey: No, nothing. Only, like I said, what we did one day, we would go up and see how it came out as far as being tested the next day. We got to where we were doing vertical welding where you went up, instead of flat work. When you got to where you could do that, you were considered a very good welder. After you had worked a while, a few months, you became a vertical welder. And around the portholes, that was very

Cathey: important to do that welding, because that was in a circular, and you would admire your work or holler about it.

Dunning: You mentioned that you were looking for your union book. Could you talk about your membership in the union, and what union it was?

Cathey: I don't remember. I wish I had that book, because it gave the date that I joined. I didn't attend any of the meetings.

Dunning: Was it mandatory to join?

Cathey: I believe it was. They took the union dues out of your check before you got it. But I wasn't active. Just like when I went to work for the telephone company. I joined a union, although it wasn't mandatory at that time, just because everyone else belonged, and in order to work with the people, why you kind of go along. Although I did attend meetings after I became a telephone company worker.

But in the shipyards, I did join, but I didn't attend the meetings. I wish I could find that book.

Dunning: Perhaps it will resurface at some time.

Cathey: We've lived in this house for thirty-eight years, so you can imagine the accumulation we have.

Dunning: This is the house that you were married in?

Cathey: We were married right in front of that fireplace, right in that living room. It's sort of sentimental, and like I said, we've added on and made it comfortable for us. But we have accumulated many things. I'm not one to throw things away, so everything is bulging, the

Cathey: closets, and the drawers, and we even built our little house in the back, and it's full. That's where I found the picture.

Dunning: Your little storage area out back?

Cathey: Yes. We have some old suitcases back there, and I dug into those. That's where I found that one picture.

Postwar Richmond

Dunning: What was Richmond like right after the war? You mentioned that in your memory, a lot of people left.

Cathey: Yes, and after you mentioned, too, that people came back, I do remember a lot of people coming back too. Most of the people that we knew stayed and went into business. Some of them worked at different jobs. One couple, the one that took me in on my first Christmas, they moved away from Richmond, but they stayed in California. They didn't go back to their home in Arkansas, I believe.

I think a lot of people at that time wondered what would happen to Richmond, if it would just fold, or if it would continue to grow. And it did. It didn't fold. It grew, I think, for a while. Then it folded.

Dunning: When do you think it started folding?

Cathey: Well, it's hard for me to say. It seems to me it folded when we had that awful fire in downtown Richmond. We had kind of a riot over, I think it was racism. They burned Richmond.

Decline_of_Downtown_Richmond

Dunning: That would have been in 1968?

Cathey: I can't remember the year, but I remember it was a horrible time for everyone.

Dunning: Do you remember the circumstances of that?

Cathey: I thought it happened over the police chasing some young black people. I don't remember what happened, whether they killed them. It seemed like they did. It started all the riots.

That particular night that all the fires went, we were at a friend's home celebrating a birthday. They lived up on the hill, and we looked downtown and saw all the fires. Of course, we read about it in the paper the next day, and I remember all the sheriffs riding. They had shotguns in the middle of their cars, and they were riding up and down Macdonald and all the streets patrolling after the fire. I think it kind of went downhill after that. Very much. Especially downtown Richmond.

I remember when I first went to work for the telephone company, we used to walk from the Twenty-first and Macdonald downtown to Richmond on our lunch hour, and we would shop, or do whatever we had to do downtown. We walked anywhere. We didn't worry about anyone hurting us. Then, after that, downtown Richmond really went down. We were afraid to go anywhere.

Dunning: With redevelopment, a lot of buildings were torn down. Did that come before or after that night?

Cathey: That was after. Redevelopment tore the buildings after. Then Macy's and Penney's, all the big businesses moved out. No one went downtown. I

Cathey: remember I used to shop so much downtown. I would go and just wouldn't have any fear at all, walking, or even driving my car and parking, and shopping after dark. I wouldn't even drive downtown Richmond now, after dark.

That's what I remember as being the beginning of the downfall. Whether that was it or not, I don't know. It seemed like everything happened after that. But it has changed so much. I hope it comes back, but I don't know if it will or not.

Dunning: How do you hope it comes back?

Cathey: I'd like to see it go back to like it was, when people were going shopping downtown.

Dunning: Do you think there will ever be another downtown?

Cathey: I doubt it. I really don't think so. There are a few businesses down there now, I think. In the old Breuner's there's a little mall. I've never been in there though.

I have a friend that has a little shop. It's right off of the old Tenth Street. Her name is Jo Anne. She had a dress shop in the middle of the block on Macdonald between Macy's and the corner there. I can't remember any of those other buildings. But she's still down there.

I really don't know if Richmond will ever come back downtown.

Dunning: What do you think about the new development in the Marina district? Do you think that's going to take off? Also the Brickyard Cove condominiums they're building.

Cathey: I hope so. It's so nice, some of them. We drove down there. We went through the tunnel and went around. But getting there, all that awful road, and those tanks and things that are there. I'm sure that people who live there would love to have that all taken away. But they have some beautiful homes out there. And the new marina, we haven't driven there only once, and it wasn't finished, so I really don't know much about that.

Dunning: It hasn't been selling really fast.

Cathey: It hasn't? That's too bad, because there's a lot of money invested there. I do think maybe our city council--I'm not much into politics--but I do think they kind of drag their feet. We compare Richmond with the little town of San Pablo out here, and it seems like they're doing so much more in San Pablo, and getting all those vacant lots filled up with something, if it's condominiums, or townhouses, or whatever. Maybe they're not businesses, but at least they're filling up all those vacant lots out there with something. Building seems to be going more there than Richmond.

Richmond--although they have a lot of new condominium apartments--there's still a lot of vacant buildings. That Hotel Don is just an eyesore. Go by it, and all the windows are broken.

Dunning: I guess one thing that really strikes me in Richmond is that there doesn't seem to be a center.

Cathey: There isn't. There really isn't. Someone was telling me that they might even close that huge social security building. Of course, that's part of the federal government, but I would think that would be an awful waste to have that huge building sitting there with nothing in it. Of course, that's hearsay.

Changes in the Neighborhood

Dunning: How has your neighborhood changed? You're at Twenty-third and Esmond.

Cathey: When we moved here, all these lots were vacant all the way around us, all the way up to that big tall house there. But those two houses behind us were not there. It was all vacant lots. Of course, it's all built up.

We have a dilemma about our house, our home. It's an old home, but we have it like we want it. If we could just pick it up and put it somewhere else, we would be happier. We don't feel too secure here. We've already been robbed once.

We are so particular about locking our doors and not leaving our house vacant if we happen to go away. When we first moved here, we didn't lock a door in this house. We left it wide open and didn't worry about anything. We certainly can't do that now. We don't like that. I think it's universal though, in Richmond. Not because of where we are. A lot of people feel the same way where they live.

I don't know where, if we could move our house, where we could find a secure place. This morning's paper had an article about Rossmoor in Walnut Creek, and how the people who bought into there feel so secure because they have this twenty-four hour guard on the gate. But that's just one little area. Think about all the other families and people who live all in Contra Costa County. It would be pretty hard to find security for everyone.

Dunning: And Twenty-third Street is really a pretty active place.

Cathey: Oh, yes. I used to have a little dog. She lived to be eighteen years old. She died last November. But I would have to get up in the night to take her out, because her little kidneys would act more when she got older.

I would stand out here in the backyard, and I would hear these street noises on Twenty-third Street. Sometimes you would hear loud, angry voices, sometimes there would be singing. This would be at two, and three, and four o'clock in the night. I just often think about what goes on up and down Twenty-third Street through the night hours when we're in our beds sleeping.

Dunning: Trying to sleep.

Cathey: Well, we don't hear the noises. It's surprising. I guess we're used to the street noises, because we do have a lot of them. But it doesn't bother us, that part. I just often think about what must be going on on Twenty-third Street. Of course, there are certain times of the year when they have this night of dragging main, as they used to say, and they use Twenty-third Street. Those are pretty wild, I think.

Dunning: You seem to be able to get a lot of traffic sounds here.

Cathey: Oh, yes, we do. We got a lot of traffic sounds. We sleep in the front bedroom, which is right off of Esmond, but it doesn't keep us awake. We're sound sleepers. I guess maybe we're used to it. We had guests, when they come to visit us, that complain about the street noises, especially if it happens to be a warm night and we have the windows open. But we don't keep our windows open because they're right on the street. We would be afraid to. So we just get a fan to keep us cool.

Children's Adjustment to Richmond

Dunning: One thing I didn't ask you very much about was the schools. Your children joined you from Iowa in '46?

Cathey: Well, not quite as soon in '46. They went to junior high. Both of them went to junior high when they started to school here, so they had already been through grade school in Iowa. They went to Longfellow, which is no longer there. It was on Twenty-third Street where the Grand Auto store is now. It used to be Longfellow Junior High. They went there for three years, sixth, seventh, and eighth, I believe. Then they went from there to Richmond High, and they both graduated.

Dunning: I've heard some people say that the schools got pretty overcrowded during that time.

Cathey: Yes. I think when each one of them graduated, their classes were in the eight and nine hundreds, the graduating class. That was before they had the John Kennedy High School. Lynn is forty-five, so he's been out of school a while, and Steve is forty-three, so they both have been out a long time.

Dunning: How was their adjustment to Richmond?

Cathey: They didn't have any problems. They liked it, especially my oldest son Lynn. He was into cars, and he still works on cars. That's his job. He runs the shop that Ray had. He accumulated friends. He was more likely to bring his friends home, where Steve didn't, when he got into cars and things. He got married a lot younger than Lynn too, even though he's the youngest.

Cathey: Lynn used to bring his friends home, but they were all into cars. They had to have these--I guess they called them hot rods then. They probably don't call them that now. They weren't into these low cars, like the--

Dunning: Lowriders?

Cathey: Lowriders. They weren't into that. In fact, for a while they were hiking them up in the back. They called them rakes, I think. Ray kept his finger on Lynn. He wouldn't let him ruin his car too much. Ray is one to keep the car like it is. Don't start making it different. Lynn had to kind of do what Ray said.

Dunning: How did they get along with their new father?

Cathey: Very well. In fact, they sort of lost touch with their real father. He lived in Berkeley, but he--

Dunning: He did remarry?

Cathey: Yes. He became an alcoholic, which turned them both off. While they were still in high school, I think they visited. They would still visit with him, but after they graduated from school, Lynn went to work for Standard Oil. My youngest son, when he graduated from high school, he enlisted in the army and served his time in the army, and when he came out of the army he got married, so he lost track of his father that way.

Because my ex-husband had this drinking problem, it sort of turned them off. They didn't like that too much. Although I never met his wife, from what they said, she didn't especially like the family or his family before they were married. I think he's still around--I don't know--they don't contact him.

Ray has always treated them just like they were his children. We weren't lucky enough to have any of our own. He just made them like--they call him dad.

Cathey: When he retired from his little shop on 13th Street, my oldest son took over, and he is still running the shop, and it's still under our name, Cathey, although my son's name is Alexander. He's still running the shop and doing well. He married a girl who had three children, and he later adopted them, so they are his now. And they had one of their own. That's how I got four grandchildren.

Dunning: You had a bonus.

Cathey: Yes. Then my youngest son married a girl from Oklahoma that he met when he was in the service. He was stationed in Arkansas. I think it was right on the line of Oklahoma/Arkansas. They had four children. They lived in California for a while, in Fremont. When the grandchildren were small, she didn't like the environment they were being exposed to, so they went on a vacation back to Missouri to visit her relatives, and while there they found a place that they wanted to move to, so they moved. They sold their home here and moved. They live in Missouri near St. Louis. They're doing okay.

Closing Thoughts

Dunning: Do you have any special ambitions now, things that you would like to do, or places you would like to go?

Cathey: Not really. My husband has a health problem. Although he looks healthy enough, he does have heart trouble. We have done a lot of camping and fishing, and we still do a little bit at Clear Lake in the summertime. Not a lot. We have a little mini-wagon out there in the front that we camp in. It's not like pitching a tent and camping out. It's more comfortable. We still like to do that.

Cathey: I've always wanted to go on a cruise, but Ray doesn't like close places. Whenever we have visited other people who have gone on cruises, we see those small cabins that they have to sleep in, and that just turns Ray off. He won't.

Dunning: All you have to do is sleep in them.

Cathey: Yes, but he just can't. I can't get him to.

Dunning: He has a little claustrophobia?

Cathey: He has that very much. That's the only thing I really would like to do is go on a cruise. But we've had lots of enjoyable times. He has family in Texas, and Seattle, and San Diego, and we visit quite often to the family. Most of our vacations are spent that way.

As the family gets older, and some of them aren't as in good a health as they were, we like to keep in touch every year in order just to be close to the family. Like I said, his family has accepted me as one of them, and that's all the family I have other than my sons. So that's what we do.

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add now? Either about the shipyard, or about Richmond in general?

Cathey: Well, I like Richmond because I'm here. I like a smaller place. I don't like big cities like San Francisco. I like to be familiar with my surroundings.

I wish it had a little bit of a better name. I don't know if you've lived in Richmond. When you tell people you live in Richmond, they kind of get a negative feeling. It doesn't have a very good name, I guess.

Cathey: I wish it could be better, but I don't know what can bring that about. I'm not a politician, so I don't know about the politics, and if that would help. Sometimes, like I said, I think the city council drags their feet a little bit. I wish they would get more activity going, but maybe they're handicapped too, with the money. It takes money to promote things. Maybe some day.

Of course, we're in our later years now, and we know that any change that we might make would be for moving from this house to an apartment, or someplace where we wouldn't have the upkeep. That would be the only thing we would do, but the young people, I feel sorry for them. I wish they would have a better place to live. That's about it.

Dunning: Well, if at a later time you have some additional thoughts, just give me a call, and I can always come by again with a new tape. Thank you very much.

Cathey: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

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